

**Greater Monterey County Integrated Regional Water Management Program  
Regional Water Management Group Meeting**

**October 16, 2019  
Moss Landing Marine Labs**

**RWMG Entity Attendees:**

Shandy Carroll – Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office  
Ross Clark – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
Beth Febus – Big Sur Land Trust  
Bridget Hoover – Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary  
Alex Johansson – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
Paul Robins – Resource Conservation District of Monterey County  
Eric Tynan – Castroville Community Services District  
Maya Vavra – Central Coast Wetlands Group  
Jessica Williamson – Central Coast Wetlands Group

**Non-RWMG Attendees:**

Jeff Condit – Monterey Regional Storm Water Management Program  
John Hunt – UC Davis  
Heather Lukacs – Community Water Center  
Katie McNeill – Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Karen Nilsen – Nilsen and Associates  
Susan Robinson – Greater Monterey County IRWM Program Director

**Meeting Minutes**

**1. Brief Introductions.**

**2. Central Coast Wetlands Group – New Project:** The Central Coast Wetlands Group (CCWG) was recently informed that they have been awarded grant funds from the California Wildlife Conservation Board for a two-year multi-stakeholder planning project. The project deals with resiliency of agriculture in the face of winter flooding, specifically along the Gabilan and Old Salinas River. The project will work with landowners along the Tembladero Slough to investigate ways to move away from flood prone drainage areas. Ross Clark began the presentation by emphasizing how this project has resulted directly out of the IRWM and Storm Water Resource Plan (SWRP) processes, and noted that the CCWG project team will be looking to IRWM members as partners to help make this project successful.

The problems this project is addressing: 1) flooding of ag land in the lower Salinas Valley, exacerbated by King Tides, with further exacerbation anticipated due to sea level rise; 2) flooding also exacerbated by land development and certain farming practices; 3) the County lacks site control and funding to address these challenges (MCWRA is responsible for flood control but does not own the Rec Ditch, rather works via a complex set of access agreements). This pilot project is being implemented to see if some of these hurdles can be addressed. Other grant funds are also available (e.g., IRWM, storm water, water bond), which may be accessed in the future.

Ross showed a map of Moro Cojo Slough and described the work that CCWG and other organizations (such as Elkhorn Slough Foundation) have done over the years to acquire easements and revert flood-prone ag land back to natural habitat. This is essentially what CCWG proposes to do in Tembladero. In Moro Cojo, they had the advantage of working from a management plan; no such plan exists for the lower Gabilan watershed. Project tasks include the following:

1. Develop a “managed retreat strategy” to move away from flood-prone areas, and identify ways to work with growers to acquire areas that are already difficult to farm due to periodic flooding.

2. Negotiate landowner agreements.
3. Pilot project designs and permitting: Complete 80% project design for two linear floodplain restoration projects or one linear and one “lake” retention/wetland restoration project within the lower Salinas Valley.
4. Evaluate flood reduction benefits and habitat benefits, and develop project proposals to submit for IRWM and SWRP implementation funds.

Ross displayed a list of anticipated partners and stakeholders (many of which participate in IRWM). The initial steps of the process include fact finding (e.g., what are the challenges? where are the flood-prone areas? what are farmers’ needs? how to integrate the needs of Castroville and Monterey One Water?) and establishing a working team. Ross concluded by stating that the “Castroville to the Coast” project can meet multiple environmental objectives while retaining viable ag and helping to enhance flood protection.

There were several questions and comments. Paul Robins offered the RCD’s assistance in working with farmers (gladly accepted). Heather Lukacs wondered whether the project might have benefits for groundwater, or impact the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP). Ross noted that soil characteristics in the project area restrict the migration of irrigation water to aquifers; however, it will be important to maintain enough flow in the Rec Ditch and Old Salinas River to prevent the migration of salt water upstream. Bridget wondered whether sites have already been identified. Ross responded yes, letters of support have been obtained from three landowners thus far. Katie McNeill commented that she’s continually impressed by CCWG’s “ability to move mountains” and offered partnership from the Regional Board, if that would prove beneficial.

**3. Updates from Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board:** Katie McNeill provided a presentation on the Central Coast Regional Board’s regional priorities, the Nonpoint Source Grant Program activities, and the upcoming Prop 1 Stormwater Grant Program solicitation.

The Regional Board’s highest priorities are as follows (with the first two being most important):

1. Preventing and correcting threats to human health
2. Preventing and correcting degradation of aquatic habitat
3. Preventing degradation of hydrologic processes (e.g., LID, maintaining natural channels)
4. Preventing/reversing seawater intrusion
5. Preventing further degradation of groundwater basins from salts

Grant funding is driven by these priorities. Grants are available for programs related to: surface and groundwater assessment and protection; environmental justice/disadvantaged communities (DACs); Safe and Affordable Drinking Water; sustainable groundwater management; IRWM; recycled water, storm water, wastewater; habitat restoration and protection/IWRP; climate change; and homelessness. Katie emphasized that the Regional Board wants to see actual improvements in surface water and groundwater, and are looking to install more monitoring sites through their Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program (CCAMP).

The Regional Board’s goals for grants are to: facilitate the successful implementation of grant projects aligned with measurable goals and water quality priorities; integrate grant project data and products into Water Board programs; and provide easy access to grant information to internal and external stakeholders. The Regional Board selects projects to achieve the following objectives: improve water and habitat quality; collaborate with partners; facilitate funding opportunities; leverage resources; streamline permits; evaluate effectiveness and share results; demonstrate innovative and tangible outcomes; fund effective outreach and education; and effectively manage grants.

Katie then provided an overview of the CWA 319(h) and Timber Fund grant program. The deadline for applications is December 17, 2019. The highest priorities for this solicitation are:

- Nutrient and pesticide reduction on irrigated lands, including source control (especially), edge of field, and regional systems. Nutrient and pesticide reduction is the highest priority for the 319(h) grant program.

- Erosion control related to salmonid and fisheries habitat restoration (funded through Timber Fund) and post fire recovery (funded through either 319(h) or Timber Fund)

Katie gave several examples of nutrient and pesticide reduction projects, including source control, edge of field treatment systems, and regional systems (e.g., regional bioreactors, pesticide granular activated carbon treatment, and constructed treatment wetlands). She said the Regional Board particularly likes to fund projects that create wetlands, riparian areas, and other aquatic habitats. She noted that proposals for the 319(h) grant need to have an adopted TMDL associated, but the Timber Fund program does not – though the project would need to be within a State Responsibility area. The Timber Fund can fund projects that focus on high quality waterbodies. She is especially interested in projects in Elkhorn Slough and Arroyo Seco area (if anyone knows of any projects in those areas, they should contact her).

Katie provided some examples of projects that focused on aquatic health, habitat restoration, post fire recovery, and Human Right to Drinking Water (very high priority for the Central Coast office). She also briefly discussed livestock and land projects and rural road erosion control, funded through 319(h). Paul Robins asked whether those projects must have an associated TMDL, and Katie responded not necessarily. The program targets manure management; however, if there's fisheries habitat (e.g., Big Sur creeks) then a project may be eligible under the Timber Fund, as long as it's within a State Responsibility area.

Katie then described the Prop 1 Storm Water Grant Program, which is administered by the State Water Resources Control Board. Projects must be designed to infiltrate, filter, store, treat, or retain storm water or dry weather runoff. The program seeks multi-benefit projects, including: water supply, water quality, flood protection, environmental, and community benefits (e.g., creating green space). The Round 2 Storm Water Implementation Grant solicitation is anticipated for March 2020. Technical assistance funding will be available to support engineering/design costs, MHI survey, etc., or if an applicant lacks the capacity to develop the proposal.

Katie listed the Central Coast Water Board's Grant Program site selection priorities, which include among others, addressing impairment to groundwater or surface water, addressing TMDLs, DAC benefits, nonpoint source control projects, load reduction and treatment capacity (demonstrating a range of compliance alternatives for people who are regulated by the Regional Board or other agencies), protecting beneficial uses (e.g., drinking water, fisheries). She noted that the program relies on stakeholders/partnerships: landowner brings their land and expertise as match, and the project proponent leverages other sources of funds. Operation and maintenance is always a challenge since grant funds don't fund that. Katie concluded by inviting everyone to provide feedback to the Regional Board on their grant programs – they're always open to improvements.

Bridget asked about future grant opportunities and state bonds, specifically about the 319(h) program, and what Katie saw as the future for IRWM. Katie responded that the 319(h) program has been pretty consistent over the years – the Regional Board receives about \$8 million/year from the EPA, half of which is targeted for grants; and typically the Central Coast Regional Board receives about 15-20% of that amount. That typically funds 1-2 projects/year, on the order of \$450K-800K. She emphasized that up to 10% of projects can go to a high quality waterbody that is not impaired. Regarding IRWM, she said that the State Board and Regional Board certainly support and value IRWM, but DWR is the administrator of the program so they would be in a better position to answer Bridget's question. She offered to look into it...

**4. IRWM Roundtable:** Susan Robinson opened the floor for those in the room to share news or their latest projects. She began by announcing, on behalf of John Olson who could not be present, a workshop for small water system operators that CSUMB will be hosting on October 26, 2019. The workshop is free but limited to 40 participants. Contact John for more information ([joolson@csumb.edu](mailto:joolson@csumb.edu)).

Karen Nilsen announced that \$1.3 million in State funds have just been awarded for a drinking water consolidation project in the Apple Avenue neighborhood near the City of Greenfield. The project will connect three small water systems, all of which are DAC, with the City's water system. Construction is expected to start by late spring 2020. This is momentous as, she noted, this is the first of the projects to come out of the Salinas

Valley DAC Plan to be implemented. The Salinas Valley DAC Plan was developed by the Greater Monterey County IRWM region with grant support from the State Water Board. Karen also announced that she (as a member of the DAC Involvement project team) will be submitting a Drinking Water SRF application for the Hacienda Apartments drinking water project near the City of Soledad within the next month.

Bridget Hoover announced that the Sanctuary's Nautilus resource vessel has just spotted a whale fall at the Davidson Seamount, and that it is being captured live (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZzQhiNQXxU>).

Beth Febus announced that on Saturday November 9, the Big Sur Land Trust will be co-hosting a Planting Day with Return of the Natives at 10am at their Carr Lake property, to engage community members and to develop the native plant garden. Then on November 20 at 6pm, Big Sur Land Trust will be facilitating a community meeting to present the 30% Design and obtain stakeholder feedback.

Paul Robins said the RCD is gearing up for their winter erosion assistance program, with support from the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the Ag Commissioner's Office. The program focuses on cover crops, providing funds to small and large producers for seed. The RCD has also been busy working on arundo eradication in the Salinas River (along with removal of fences, garbage, tires ... and homeless people). The RCD has treated 600 out of an estimated 1,500 acres, though unfortunately they've seen re-growth of arundo in the treated areas due to increased moisture (rain).

Heather Lukacs announced that the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) has just released the full draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan. It is available on their website at <https://svbgsa.org/groundwater-sustainability-plan/180-400-ft-aquifer/>

The 45-day public comment period is now open, with comments due November 25, 2019. The GSA will be hosting four public workshops:

- October 23 at 6pm in Gonzales
- October 28 at 6pm in Salinas
- November 6 at 6pm in King City
- November 13 at 6pm in Castroville

For more information visit the GSA website. Heather said that the Community Water Center (CWC) and San Jerardo Cooperative will be co-hosting a Spanish-language workshop on October 24 at 5:30pm at San Jerardo Cooperative, entitled "Protecting Drinking Water and Groundwater Planning in the Salinas Valley." The workshop will focus on private and domestic wells and small water systems. Heather also reported that CWC has been very active with funding from SB 200, the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. They are working with the Central Coast Regional Board on their free well testing program, and soon will be helping to implement a regional bottled water program. Contact Heather for more information ([heather.lukacs@communitywatercenter.org](mailto:heather.lukacs@communitywatercenter.org)).

Shandy Carroll announced the Central Coast Invasive Weed Symposium on November 14, in Carmel Valley. The Symposium is an annual workshop to encourage active engagement in the conservation of California wildlands. Registration is currently open. For more information: <https://www.cciws.org/>. Shandy also announced that she has recently become a member of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Sanctuary Advisory Council.

Katie McNeill noted that if anyone is interested in Peter Meerten's presentation on the turbidity TMDL for the Gabilan Watershed (which was taking place at the same time as this meeting), to contact Peter Meertens at [Peter.Meertens@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Peter.Meertens@waterboards.ca.gov).

**5. Other Business.** Susan announced that the November RWMG meeting will be canceled. We'll resume meeting in December.

*The next RWMG meeting will be held on December 18, 2019, 1:30PM – 3:30PM, location TBD.*